THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You can put this before the Chairman. If he allows, you can have a discussion on it.

HARASSMENT OF INDIAN CITIZENS BY U.S. IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES

SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI (Kerala): Madam, with your permission, I raise an important issue about the attitude of the US immigration authorities and security personnel towards Indian citizens visiting the United States. These authorities are treating Indian citizens as terrorists and are trying to harass them. There are reports in today's press about the experience of a Malayalam Actress called Samyukhta Varma. She was visiting New York with her father, mother and sister. They were detained by the authorities for interrogation for hours together. This is not an isolated incident. When Somnath Chatterjee, the leader of the CPI(M) group in the Lok Sabha visited the United States of America, he was detained by the immigration authorities, and they asked him to sign in Bengali. Earlier, Kamal Hasan was detained, and he was not allowed to visit another place. We are asking the American Government to declare Pakistan as a terrorist State. The United States of America is treating the Indians as terrorists. So, I would request the Government of India to take up this matter with the United States authorities and try to take appropriate measures, upholding the dignity of the Indian citizens.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Premachandran, only one name is being permitted. Mr. S. Ramachandran Pillai had sought the permission of the Chairman for raising this issue, and he made his statement. Now, we have the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs. He wants to give a personal explanation.

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): Madam, I am very sorry that when the Leader of the Opposition raised this matter, I was not present in the House, because, today being a Friday, both the Ministers have to submit the next week report to both the Houses, and I could not leave that House on time. Secondly, I would like to say that I have the highest respect for the Office of the President and Vice-President, and more respect even for Dr. Manmohan Singhji. So, I am not going to argue on how I made a statement and what statement I made. If a person like

Dr. Manmohan Singhji thinks that the statement was in bad taste, I am sorry about it.

SHRI AHMED PATEL (Gujarat): Of course, it was in bad taste.

SPECIAL MENTIONS

Social Security for Dependent Aged

MISS MABEL REBELLO (Madhya Pradesh): Madam, India has a population of ten crore aged people, who are above sixty years. Out of them, 40 per cent are living below the poverty line, and nearly 8 per cent of them are destitute. The physical and financial dependency of the aged is reported to be on the increase, as majority of them are not covered under any of the social security measures, like supplementary pensions, health insurance etc. It is estimated that 90 per cent of the aged in India are lacking social security measures.

Medical care is the most important thing for which the aged need security measures. Vulnerabilities to diseases and disabilities increase as a person gets aged. It is reported that those who are aged between 65-74 years, suffer an average of 4.6 types of chronic conditions of which more than 60 per cent are multiple. For those above 75 years, the mean number of ailments per person is 5.8. The cost of medical care for a person with multiple disease problem ranges from Rs. 1500-10,000 a month, depending upon the severity of the problem.

The National Old Age Pension Scheme, which is supposed to provide financial assistance to the elderly, has very limited coverage. The Government's target was to cover a population of 54,48,660 under this programme in the year 2001. But, the actual coverage in the year 2001 was only 2,06,810. Interventions through NGOs are also found to be very limited.

Hence, the Government should come up with a comprehensive legislation, offering proper social security measures to the old more particularly, to the destitute old. Thank you.

Non-Inclusion of Orissa in Reduced Air-Fare Zone

DR. M.N. DAS (Orissa): Madam Deputy Chairman, the subject of my Special Mention is non-inclusion of Orissa in the reduced air-fare zone. It is a case of clear discrimination.